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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the efforts of a geographically isolated school district in Alaska to develop an outcome-based curriculum for preschool through 12th grade. In 1986, the new assistant superintendent for instruction introduced the idea of a district-wide outcome-based curriculum. The first curricular area selected for development was a preschool program. Over the course of 5 years, programs for the remaining grade levels were developed. Committee members included teachers, community members and parents, and school board members. The assistant superintendent served as the facilitator and resource person. The committees were trained to use the systems approach to the development of an outcome-based curriculum. This consisted of describing and explaining the idea of an outcome-based curriculum and training members to write learner outcomes in behavioral terms. The body of knowledge to be covered in a subject area was divided into major categories of areas called strands. Each strand was then divided into supporting areas called topics. The learner outcomes were vertically articulated throughout the curriculum moving sequentially from one grade level to the next. Implementation of the curriculum was effective because participating teachers felt a sense of ownership in the curriculum and the committees provided inservice workshops to the other teachers. This type of curriculum development project requires time and money. (KS)

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One School's Approach to Outcome Based Education

by

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The State of Alaska is geographically vast with small, isolated pockets of very diverse population groups; this size and diversity extends to the individual school districts as well. The Lake and Peninsula School District, roughly the size and shape of the State of Tennessee, is about 550 air miles long and, at its widest point, about 100 air miles wide. In this extremely large geographical region are a number of very small villages that are almost entirely dependent on the commercial salmon fishing industry for their economical base. The Lake and Peninsula School District maintains 15 schools in as many villages with a total student population of about 700 students. These schools are very small and physically isolated from each other; however, there is a great deal of travel between these villages by the local people. There are no roads connecting these villages and all face-to-face contact between the villagers is accomplished by air travel. The student population in these schools ranges from under 10 students to approximately 100 students in Preschool through 12th grade. The small number of students at each site requires teachers to teach more than one grade level at the same time. Since students frequently move between schools, a teacher will periodically find an additional student in class. This makes it essential that a consistent curriculum be utilized throughout the District to insure that students who change residences periodically, have as little disruption as possible in their educational program.

During the 1970s' and early 80s' the State of Alaska realized a tremendous increase in State revenues due to oil and gas lease sales as well as revenue from the Alaska Oil Pipeline. Because of the high priority given to education by the people and legislature of Alaska, the increase in State revenues was passed on to the individual school districts within the State. With these increased funds it was hoped that school districts and communities within the State would be able to provide a quality education that would result in the best possible educational experience for these students. It was a commonly held view that rural Alaska was many years behind the rest of the Nation technologically and socially, and through a good, solid educational experience for students this difference could be eliminated.

With the idea of supporting and maintaining dedicated teachers, school districts, particularly rural school districts, utilized this increase in funds to supply teachers with almost every kind of educational material or program the teachers desired. Regardless of the fact that adequate funds were available and teachers' salaries were high, there was still a high turnover of teachers in the rural school districts. This turnover often reached the 80 to 100 % level each year. This was primarily due to the isolation and primitive conditions that many teachers had to endure in these isolated villages. With the available funds new teachers were able to order materials and textbook series which were familiar to

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them. Often a school would have a new textbook series or supplemental materials every year or two. Much of this material was used only during the time that teacher was under contract; then it was stored and gathered dust as more new texts and materials were ordered by new teachers. Under these conditions it was very difficult for a school district to maintain continuity in a curriculum that was textbook driven. Most of the Rural Alaskan School Districts have been in this situation and The Lake and Peninsula School District was no different.

After considerable time, effort and money, The Lake and Peninsula School District, for the first time since its inception, began the 1986-87 school year with a common textbook series identified for each grade and subject area. Curriculum development had consisted of adopting a textbook series and copying down the scope and sequence that accompanies all text series. These textbooks were selected by committees made up of teachers from throughout the district and were approved by the Regional School Board. Although it was a textbook-based curriculum, this was the first attempt by The Lake and Peninsula School District to have a District-wide curriculum. In 1986 the new Assistant Superintendent for Instruction introduced the idea of a district-wide outcome based curriculum that would eventually be evaluated through the use of criterion-referenced examinations that would measure actual student achievement based on the identified outcomes. This type of curriculum would be developed through the use of a systems approach to curriculum development and would utilize the expertise of the staff and communities. Previously the staff and communities had largely been excluded from curriculum decisions and resented the idea of having to develop more curriculum material "that would not be used anyway." Facing resentment from these sources I, as the new assistant superintendent, was faced with the dilemma of how to begin the process of building a curriculum based on the identified needs of students in this school district. With all of this information in mind, I decided to start with something that was perceived as a need by the staff and communities as well as something that was not viewed as "threatening". Therefore, the first curricular area selected for development was a preschool program where the curriculum would be based on specific learner outcomes that would be used as the entrance skills for kindergarten.

There were several reasons the preschool area was not viewed as "threatening". First, because there was no preschool curriculum, we were not suggesting changes to something that was already in place. Secondly, there was a great deal of concern on the part of the kindergarten teachers regarding the skill and behavior level of students entering formal schooling. These teachers were very interested in finding ways to ensure that students entering kindergarten had had appropriate experiences necessary to prepare these students for kindergarten. One way of addressing this concern would be to develop a district-wide preschool curriculum which would ensure that skills needed to enter kindergarten were taught at the preschool level. A majority of the primary teachers were adamant about developing a more structured curriculum for the preschool program. They felt they were having to spend so much time on socialization skills that there was inadequate time for academic preparation. Because of the personal interest and commitment to these

concerns, there were a lot of volunteers who were anxious to help develop a preschool curriculum.

Once the curriculum committee was established, I had to train them in the systems approach to the development of an outcome based curriculum. This consisted of describing and explaining the idea of an outcome based curriculum and training them to write learner outcomes in behavioral terms. The idea was to have a curriculum which identified the body of knowledge to be covered in a subject area and divide it into major categories or areas called strands. Each strand was then divided into supporting areas called topics with learner outcomes written to address all areas within each of those topics. The learner outcomes or objectives were vertically articulated throughout the curriculum moving sequentially from one grade level to the next.

It was felt that because teachers were the ones who would implement the curriculum that they, with the help of community members, should have the primarily responsibility for the development of the curriculum. My role as Assistant Superintendent was to act as a facilitator and resource person during the development process. This included answering technical questions about the process and assisting with the development of the format. Throughout this process the staff and community members were generally eager to participate in this curriculum work because they felt a real sense of ownership in the product, which resulted in them being very positive in their support of the implementation of the curriculum. Having received very favorable reviews from preschool committee members, the rest of the staff became more interested in this approach to the curriculum development process. During each of the ensuing years one or two of the content areas was identified for development of learner outcomes. After five years of this development work, the District had finished all subject areas for all grade levels.

Curriculum Committee

The members of the committee came from three sources: teachers, community members/parents, and school board members. The majority of the committee was made up of regular teachers representing different grade levels. The selection of teacher members for the curriculum committee was an extremely important process if the staff was to accept and implement the curriculum into the regular school day. There were a number of criteria that were considered during this selection process. First, the committee members had to have a desire to participate in the project as well as some expertise in the subject area. Second, it was important to select teachers who were respected by the rest of the staff and had some longevity in the District . Third, it was extremely important not to select teachers who would "sabotage" the project. This was a very difficult judgement decision. It is a good idea to have at least one teacher who is openly skeptical of this type of project involved as a committee member. If teachers with differing view points are kept out of the project, they often interpreted it as "packing the court". It is important not to select teachers who are going to produce a predetermined product. This could cause skepticism for the project to escalate and this, in turn, would be communicated to other staff

members. An extra effort needs to be made to select a curriculum committee that is open to suggestions, but at the same time has some clear ideas as to what should be taught at different grade levels.

Teachers

Teachers who are openly critical of the curriculum development project are not the ones who will undermine the project. The teachers who appear compliant and express a desire to help, but really have made up their minds that this type of project isn't beneficial are the ones who will have a negative impact on the project. There are several ways that this can happen. Perhaps the the most unintentional action is when the teacher puts very little effort into the project which many times results in an inferior product or, at least, one that is not all it can be. Another way to undermine the project involves a more overt action where the teacher starts a whisper campaign which points out all of the negative aspects and none of the positive. This activity is particularly effective if the whispers reach individuals who are still uninformed about the process or have yet to make up their minds. Perhaps the hardest negative effort to combat is where the influence of this member results in a product that is so rigid that no other teacher can utilize the curriculum. All of these behaviors are nonproductive and very difficult, if not impossible, to counter within the structure of the committee, because many times the teacher is unaware of the effects this behavior can have on the educational process as a whole.

Parents/Community

Since teachers are the ones responsible for implementing the curriculum, most of the work of developing the curriculum fell to them, but they needed assistance and support from two other important sources. To keep the lines of communication open and to encourage parental support of the educational process and students, it was crucial that parents and community members become involved in the curriculum development process. Selection of parent/community members centered around those parents who were interested enough to volunteer for the project. There are many positive reasons to include someone who is critical of the school district on the committee. What commonly occurs is that the community member, who is critical of the process and the school systems as a whole, develops a better understanding of the curriculum, the students, the school and the constraints that they all operate under. This results in them becoming very supportive of the efforts of the school district and an influence with other community members as they can explain the process from the perspective of a participant rather than an observer. The community members who participated in curriculum development for the District were very helpful in influencing other parents and community members to become more understanding and supportive of the schools educational efforts because they had been involved and felt they had actually had an influence in determining what the students were learning in school.

School Board

The District School Board was the final source from which to draw members for the curriculum committee. Each curricular area is approved by the District Board. By having a school board member as a participant in the process, one of their own becomes an advocate supporting the proposed curriculum, which results in a more positive commitment from the school board. Often it is helpful if the school board member is one who asks many questions about the curriculum and wants to be actively involved with the education process. It proved to be very beneficial to have at least one member of the school board on the committee. The members' involvement allowed them to actively support the curriculum to any of their constituents and provided them with a base of reference from which to answer questions.

Curricular Format

A systems approach to curriculum development was utilized to develop and review the curriculum. A systems approach in this situation meant that staff members would first determine what they currently had and then identify what they wanted as far as broad categories for a particular subject area. The term 'strands' was used to identify broad categories that illustrate how the information and knowledge of a subject area was divided. Through a process of discussion and evaluation, a consensus of the strands was finally determined. The strands in turn were divided into topics, and finally, outcomes were written for each of the topics. Once strands and topics were determined for the curriculum area, the committee began the process of writing learner outcomes for the kindergarten level. The outcomes for kindergarten were determined and then those were built upon to write the outcomes for 1st grade. Thus assuring that continuity and vertical articulation became an integral part of the curriculum. During the writing of outcomes, particular attention was given to the complexity of the outcome as it related to the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The outcomes were categorized as to the level of difficulty based upon Bloom's Taxonomy. This process continued for each of the grade levels with developing outcomes at one level written to mastery level or changed to become more complex developing outcomes at the next level. New outcomes were written for each level as the information and maturity of the students indicate.

To insure vertical articulation, the committees wrote objectives for higher grade levels based upon the outcomes or objectives established for lower grade levels. Outcomes or objectives that were not mastered at lower grade levels were carried through until mastered at some higher grade level. For example, in the 2nd grade social studies curriculum, under the strand Geography and the supporting topic World, the outcome was stated as follows: *The student will be able to distinguish Earth from the rest of the planets of the solar system in a model of the solar system.* This outcome was carried forward into the 3rd grade curriculum because at the 2nd grade level it was determined this outcome would be developed as opposed to mastered. In the 3rd grade curriculum this

same outcome was enhanced and reads as follows: *The student will be able to recognize the globe as a model of the world separate from the rest of the planets and describe the idea of hemispheres.* In the 3rd grade this outcome was designated as mastered which illustrates the idea of vertical articulation.

Conclusions

The process of developing the preschool curriculum was accomplished the first year with the rest of the curriculum areas being developed during the next four years. The same format for all of the curricular areas was followed, which was based on the initial work of the preschool committee. Once the process was established, subsequent curricular areas were developed more quickly with less time needed for developing an understanding of the process. Time and effort was concentrated on the development of the product. The committee members for each curricular area worked very hard at developing a curriculum that could be utilized by all of the teachers in the District, allowing for individual situations at each site. Each of the members had a great sense of pride in this accomplishment and became advocates of both the process and the product.

The work in curriculum development provided several benefits for the Lake and Peninsula School District. The most beneficial aspect of the process was that teachers felt a sense of ownership in the curriculum as they had constructed it. Therefore, they approached implementing the curriculum with a much more positive attitude. The process of implementation was very effective because the members of the curriculum committee who developed that area provided inservice workshops for the rest of the teachers. Discussions about how to teach this or that particular learner outcome was a natural part of the development of the curriculum, and this information was passed on to the entire staff as a part of the inservice on implementation. This gave the rest of the teachers a good insight into how the committee foresaw utilizing the curriculum and background information about the discussions and decisions that had gone on as a part of the development of a particular curricular area.

The teachers became more aware of the interconnectedness of the teaching/learning process and the evaluation of students' performance. Having to write the learner outcomes in measurable terms, kept the members of the committee thinking of ways to teach that particular outcome that would provide opportunities to measure for mastery. Because the teachers knew that eventually the District would develop criterion referenced achievement tests based on the outcomes within the curriculum, the committee began to see the connection between teaching and evaluation. The committee began to talk about evaluating their teaching through students' performance and then transmitted this idea to the rest of the staff through the inservice workshops.

The community members who were part of the curriculum committee began to see that developing a curriculum was more than just selecting a textbook series and that teachers had to make many decisions about teaching everyday. The community members and teachers began a dialog about teaching and learning

that carried on after the committee was finished with their part of the curriculum. This helped foster more open communication patterns between the school and community in all areas of the educational process.

This type of curriculum development project is not inexpensive in either time or money. The district must be able to commit numerous hours to the project. One of the strengths of this curriculum is the numerous discussions among the committee members in determining what strands, topics, and outcomes are needed. This took considerable time, but the investment in time created a very comprehensive and well thought out document that was usable in the diverse communities within the District. It took The Lake and Peninsula School District five years to develop the curriculum for all subject areas and grade levels. Granted, the situation in rural Alaska exacerbated the amount of time, but school districts should not look at this type of project as something that can be done in a single year. This is not a "quick-fix". Rather, it is a long-term plan to change the delivery of instruction and assessment of student learning.

Along with the investment in time, a considerable amount of money is needed to support staff in many ways which includes hiring substitutes, and in some cases, hiring an expert consultant to help with the project. Individual school districts can explore ways to help reduce the funding levels, but there is a certain amount of money that will be needed. Even with the possible drawbacks of time and money, this type of curriculum development project will yield many more benefits than drawbacks with a more clearly identified knowledge base, increased learning by students, and with greater satisfaction felt by teachers. To accomplish this the district must be willing to commit time, money, and support to the staff if the goals are to be achieved.